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For: METHOD OF REDUCING WAFER  
CONTAMINATION BY REMOVING  
UNDER-METAL LAYERS AT THE  
WAFER EDGE

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## Prioritätsbescheinigung über die Einreichung einer Patentanmeldung

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**Anmelder/Inhaber:** ADVANCED MICRO DEVICES, INC.,  
Sunnyvale, Calif./US

**Bezeichnung:** A method of reducing wafer contamination by  
removing under-metal layers at the wafer edge

**IPC:** „noch nicht festgelegt“

Die angehefteten Stücke sind eine richtige und genaue Wiedergabe der ursprünglichen Unterlagen dieser Patentanmeldung.

München, den 02. Oktober 2003  
Deutsches Patent- und Markenamt  
Der Präsident  
Im Auftrag

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## A METHOD OF REDUCING WAFER CONTAMINATION BY REMOVING UNDER-METAL LAYERS AT THE WAFER EDGE

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# **A METHOD OF REDUCING WAFER CONTAMINATION BY REMOVING UNDER-METAL LAYERS AT THE WAFER EDGE**

## **FIELD OF THE PRESENT INVENTION**

Generally, the present invention relates to the fabrication of integrated circuits and more particularly to the formation of metallization layers and substrate contaminations related thereto that are created during subsequent processes.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART**

Semiconductor devices are typically formed on substantially disc-shaped substrates made of any appropriate material. The majority of semiconductor device including highly complex electronic circuits is currently and, in the foreseeable future, will be manufactured on the basis of silicon, thereby rendering silicon substrates and silicon containing substrates, such as SOI (silicon on insulator) substrates, viable carriers for forming semiconductor devices, such as microprocessors, SRAMs ASICs (application specific ICs) and the like. The individual integrated circuits are arranged in an array form, wherein most of the manufacturing steps, which may add up to 500 and more individual process steps in sophisticated integrated circuits, are performed simultaneously for all chip areas on the substrate, except for photolithography processes, metrology processes and packaging of the individual devices after dicing the substrate. Thus, economical constraints drive semiconductor manufacturers to steadily increase the substrate dimensions, thereby also increasing the area available for producing actual semiconductor devices.

In addition to increasing the substrate area, it is also important to optimize the utilization of the substrate area for a given substrate size so as to actually use as much substrate area as possible for semiconductor devices and/or test structures that may be used for process control. In the attempt to maximize the useful surface area for a given substrate size, the peripheral chip areas are positioned as closely as possible to the substrate perimeter as it is compatible with substrate handling processes. Generally, most of the manufacturing processes are performed in an

automated manner, wherein the substrate handling is performed at the back side of the substrate and/or the substrate edge, which typically includes a bevel at least at the front side of the substrate.

Due to the ongoing demand for shrinking the feature sizes of highly sophisticated semiconductor devices copper, possibly in combination with a low-K dielectric material, has become a frequently used alternative in the formation of so-called metallization layers, which include metal lines and vias connecting individual circuit elements to provide for the required functionality of the integrated circuit. Although copper exhibits significant advantages when compared to aluminum as being the typical metallization metal for the last decade, semiconductor manufacturers have been somewhat reluctant to introduce copper owing to copper's ability to readily diffuse in silicon and silicon dioxide. Moreover, even when being present in very small amounts, copper may significantly modify the electrical characteristics of silicon and thus, the behavior of circuit elements, such as transistors, and the like. It is, therefore, essential to confine the copper to the metal lines and vias by using appropriate insulating and conductive barrier layers so as to strongly suppress the diffusion of copper into sensitive device regions. Furthermore, any contamination of process tools, such as transport means, transport containers, robot arms, wafer chucks, and the like, must effectively be restricted, since even minute amounts of copper deposited on the backside of a substrate may lead to diffusion of the copper into sensitive device areas.

The problem of copper contamination is even exacerbated when low-K dielectric materials are employed in combination with copper to form metallization layers owing to the reduced mechanical stability of the porous low-K dielectrics. Since at least some of the deposition processes used in fabricating semiconductors may not efficiently be restricted to the "active" substrate area, a stack of layers or material residues may also be formed at the substrate edge region including the bevel, thereby generating a mechanically unstable layer stack owing to process non-uniformities at the substrate edge and especially at the bevel of the substrate. During the further production and substrate handling processes, material such as copper and/or the dielectrics may delaminate and significantly affect these processes.

For instance, in forming a copper based metallization layer, the so-called damascene technique is presently a preferred manufacturing method to create metal lines and vias. To this end, a dielectric layer, possibly comprised of a low-K dielectric, is deposited and patterned so as to include trenches and vias in accordance with design requirements. Thereafter, a conductive barrier layer comprised of, for example tantalum, tantalum nitride, titanium, titanium nitride, and the like, is deposited, wherein the composition of the barrier layer is selected so as to also improve the adhesion of the copper to the neighboring dielectric. The deposition of the barrier layer may be accomplished by chemical vapor deposition (CVD) or physical vapor deposition (PVD), wherein a deposition of the barrier material may not be efficiently restricted to the active substrate area by presently established deposition techniques. Consequently, the barrier material may also be deposited at the substrate bevel and partially at the back side of the substrate. Thereafter, according to a standard damascene process flow, a thin copper seed layer is deposited by physical vapor deposition or similar appropriate processes to initiate and promote a subsequent electrochemical deposition process to fill the trenches and vias formed in the dielectric material.

Although reactor vessels for the electrochemical deposition, such as electroplating reactors or electroless plating reactors, may be designed such that substantially no copper is deposited at the substrate edge, the preceding seed layer deposition may nevertheless result in a significant deposition of unwanted copper at the substrate edge region. After the electrochemical deposition of the bulk copper any excess material has to be removed which is frequently achieved by chemical mechanical polishing (CMP), wherein material fragments, such as copper pieces, may "flake off" owing to the reduced stability of the metallization layer stack especially at the substrate bevel. The copper containing material flakes, liberated during the CMP process, may then redeposit at unwanted substrate regions or may affect the CMP process of subsequent substrates. During the further processing of the substrate, a copper contamination, mainly caused by the copper delamination at the substrate edge, may occur and may especially adversely affect the so-called back end process flow, in which contact pads and solder bumps are formed. In particular, an electrochemical reaction between copper and aluminum that is used to manufacture

the contact pads, may result in a so-called pitting reaction, thereby significantly deteriorating the reliability of the completed semiconductor device.

Since copper contamination caused by unwanted copper at the substrate edge has been identified as a major contamination source, great efforts are being made to remove copper from the substrate edge and the bevel substantially without affecting the inner, i.e. the active, substrate region. To this end, etch modules have been developed by semiconductor equipment providers, such as Semitool Inc., Novellus Inc., and the like, which are configured to selectively provide an agent substantially comprised of sulfuric acid and hydrogen peroxide to the substrate edge so as to remove unwanted copper from this region. Although the removal of unwanted copper from the substrate edge reduces the risk of copper contamination of subsequent processes, it turns out, however, that still a significant reduction of production yield, especially in the back end process flow, is observable.

In view of the problems identified above, a need exists, therefore, to provide an improved technique for reducing contamination and/or mechanical defects caused by delamination of dielectrics.

## SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Generally, the present invention is directed at a method to selectively remove unwanted material from an edge region of a substrate, wherein, after formation of a metallization, not only unwanted metal, such as copper, but also at least the underlying barrier layer is substantially completely removed. The removal of at least the layer immediately following the copper layer may reduce the build up of mechanically unstable layers during the manufacturing of a plurality of metallization layers, thereby significantly reducing the probability of delamination and thus, copper contamination of subsequent processes. The selective removal of unwanted material may be accomplished by using an etchant that is substantially comprised of a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid. If desired, the dielectric material below the barrier layer may also be removed at the substrate edge so as to finally expose the substrate surface, thereby further reducing the risk



of mechanical defects and thus substrate contamination caused delamination of dielectrics in manufacturing and substrate handling processes.

In one illustrative embodiment of the present invention, a method comprises the selective application of one or more etchants to an edge region of a substrate, which has a central region adjacent to the edge region. Moreover, a metallization layer stack is formed at least on the central region, wherein the metallization layer stack comprises at least an insulating layer, a barrier layer and a metal layer. Then, unwanted material at least from the metal layer and the barrier layer is selectively removed from the edge region.

In accordance with still another illustrative embodiment of the present invention, a method of reducing contamination of a substrate after formation of a metallization layer stack on the substrate is provided. The method comprises the selective removal of unwanted material from an edge region of the substrate by using a first etchant comprising a diluted compound of nitric acid and hydrofluoric acid as the main component.

In a further illustrative embodiment of the present invention a semiconductor structure comprises a substrate having a front side and a backside, wherein the front side is divided into a device region and an edge region. Furthermore, a plurality of semiconductor devices are formed in and over the device region, wherein each semiconductor device comprises at least one metallization layer including a dielectric layer and a metal line, the metal line being formed in the dielectric layer and being separated therefrom by a conductive barrier layer. The semiconductor structure is characterized in that the edge region is substantially devoid of material of the metal line, the barrier layer and the dielectric layer.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further advantages, objects and embodiments of the present invention are defined in the appended claims and will become more apparent with the following detailed description when taken with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1a schematically depicts a top view of a substrate including a device bearing an "active" region and edge region; and

Figs. 1b-1g schematically show cross-sectional views of a part of the substrate of Fig. 1a, wherein various steps in removing unwanted material from the edge region during the formation of one or more metallization layers are illustrated in accordance with illustrative embodiments of the present invention.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION

While the present invention is described with reference to the embodiments as illustrated in the following detailed description as well as in the drawings, it should be understood that the following detailed description as well as the drawings are not intended to limit the present invention to the particular illustrative embodiments disclosed, but rather the described illustrative embodiments merely exemplify the various aspects of the present invention, the scope of which is defined by the appended claims.

With reference to Figs. 1a-1g, further illustrative embodiments of the present invention will be described in more detail below. It should be noted that the present invention is particularly advantageous in the context of metallization layers including copper and a low-K dielectric material, since delamination of mechanically fragile low-K dielectric layers may lead to an increased contamination of subsequent processes, as previously pointed out. The present invention may, however, also be applied in combination with other metallization schemes, such as aluminum based metallization layers, and the like, thereby improving production yield due to a significant reduction of the particles created by substrate handling processes, CMP processes, and the like. Moreover, by removing unwanted material including, contrary to the conventional approach, in addition to metal also the barrier layer and, in one particular embodiment, an underlying dielectric layer,

the safety margin for an unused area at the periphery of the substrate may be decreased, thereby providing more substrate area that is available for actual semiconductor devices.

Fig. 1a schematically depicts a substrate 100 having a front side 101, on which circuit elements are to be formed, and a back side 102, which is frequently in contact with any type of substrate holders during transport and processing of the substrate 100. The front side 101 of the substrate 100 may be divided into an "active" or device region 104, within which the plurality of individual chip areas are to be arranged and into an edge region 103, which may not be used for the fabrication of circuit elements due to process non-uniformities, especially occurring at the vicinity of the substrate perimeter. The size of the edge region 103 and thus of the device region 104 depends on the controllability of the processes involved in manufacturing circuit elements on the device region 104, the capability of transport means used for supporting and transporting the substrate 100 between subsequent processes, and the like. Desirably, the size of the edge region 103 is kept as small as possible to arrange as many chip areas as possible on the device region 104. Presently, 200mm and 300mm are typical diameters of substrates used in modern semiconductor facilities, wherein a size D of the edge region 103 may range from approximately 1-5mm. The principles of the present invention, however, are not restricted to a specific size of the substrate 100 and the edge region 103. The edge region 103 typically comprises a bevel, as will be described in more detail in Fig. 1d.

Fig. 1d schematically shows a cross-sectional view of a portion of the substrate 100 including the edge region 103 having formed therein the bevel 105. A layer stack 150 comprising a first metallization layer 151 and an insulating layer 152 is formed at least over the device region 104, wherein some or all of the individual layers, of the layer stack 150, may extend into the edge region 103 and possibly across the bevel 105. The insulating layer 152 may represent a passivation layer formed above circuit elements (not shown) or may represent an etch stop layer used for the formation of the metallization layer 151. Within and below the insulating layer 152, circuit elements including contact regions may be formed which, for convenience, are not shown. The metallization layer 151 comprises a second insulating layer

153 that may be comprised of a low-K dielectric material. A trench 157 is formed in the second dielectric layer 153 and is filled with a conductive barrier material, a seed layer material and a metal, such as copper, all of which are provided in the form of a barrier layer 154, a seed layer 155 and a metal layer 156, respectively.

The layer stack 150 may be formed in accordance with well-established photolithography deposition and etch techniques as previously explained and a detailed description thereof is omitted here in order to not unduly obscure the principles of the present invention.

As previously explained, the processes for depositing the metallization layer 151 may be partly designed so as provide unwanted material even within the edge region 103 and the bevel 105 in an attempt to increase the device region 104 as much as possible. Moreover, in some deposition techniques, such as sputter deposition and CVD, it may be difficult to precisely restrict, for example the barrier layer 154, the seed layer 155 and the dielectric layer 153 to the device region 104. In particular, at an area 157 in the vicinity of the bevel 105, process non-uniformities during depositing the barrier layer 154 and/or the seed layer 155 and/or the dielectric layer 153, may result in a non-uniform layer stack having reduced mechanical stability owing to the modified adhesion characteristics of the barrier layer 154 and the seed layer 155. Furthermore, dielectric material of the dielectric layer 153 may also be deposited on the bevel 105 which may further contribute to the mechanical weakness of the layer stack over the bevel 105 due to the inherent reduced mechanical strength of the dielectric layer 153, if it is provided as a low-K material such as SiCOH, and the like, and owing to a reduced thickness and non-uniformities during the deposition process. As a consequence, parts of the layer stack 150, located over the bevel 105, may delaminate and may adversely affect subsequent processes, especially processes involved in the back end process flow. Contrary to the conventional approach, the present invention is based on the consideration that at least the seed layer 155 and possibly any residuals of the metal layer 156 and the barrier layer 154 should be removed substantially completely, at least at the bevel 105, so as to minimize the risk of contamination of subsequent processes, since even after a conventional metal removal, there may

still be tiny amounts of metal present, which may then be liberated upon delamination of the barrier layer 154 and/or the dielectric layer 153.

Fig. 1c schematically shows the substrate 100 when exposed to an etch process for substantially removing at least the seed layer 155, including any residuals of the metal layer 156, and the barrier layer 154 over the edge region 103. The substrate 100 may be placed on a substrate holder 122 of an appropriate etch module (not shown) that is configured to selectively supply an etchant 121, for example by means of a nozzle 120. The nozzle 120 and the substrate holder 122 may be configured to hold and rotate the substrate 100 with an appropriate speed so as to exert a centrifugal force to the etchant 121, thereby substantially avoiding a contact of the etchant 121 with material located above the device region 104. An appropriate etch module allowing the selective application of the etchant 121 is, for example, available from Semitool Inc. Corporation under the trademark "capsule". It should be noted, however, that the present invention is not restricted to any particular etch tool and may be practiced with any suitable etch tool that is presently available on the market. The only requirement is a sufficient inertness of the components of the etch module with respect to the etchant 121.

In one particular embodiment, the etchant 121 may be comprised of a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid (HF) and nitric acid (HNO<sub>3</sub>). The ratio of de-ionized water, hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid may be selected in accordance with the desired etch rate for a specified material, for instance copper and tantalum being present in the seed layer 155 and the barrier layer 154, respectively. For instance, de-ionized water, 79 weight percent HNO<sub>3</sub> and 49 weight percent HF may be mixed in a ratio of approximately 10:1:8 in parts by volume, and in another embodiment as a ratio of approximately 14:1:2. Moreover, the temperature of the etchant 121 may be adjusted for the above identified mixtures to approximately 25-35°C. Advantageously, the temperature of the substrate 100 may also be adjusted to the above-referenced temperature range so as to attain a required etch rate.

In one illustrative embodiment, the substrate 100 is etched in a substantially closed or protected environment so as to substantially avoid the emission of toxic etch byproducts. For instance, the metallization layer 151 may comprise copper which

may produce nitric oxide during the reaction with the etchant 121, if the etchant 121 contains nitric acid. The gaseous ambient enclosed in the etch module may then continuously or after the completion of the etch process be reworked in that nitric oxides may be converted into non-toxic products by, for example, a catalytic material. Using a diluted mixture of HF and HNO<sub>3</sub>, though it may produce nitric oxide, enables the removal of, for example, copper and tantalum based barrier material in a common etch process.

In a further illustrative embodiment, the etchant 121 may be configured so as to substantially remove copper substantially without producing nitric oxides. To this end, the etchant 121 may comprise a mixture of sulfuric acid and hydrogen oxide, and the like. Thereafter, a second etchant may be supplied to the edge region 103, wherein one or more rinsing steps may be performed to remove the etchant 121 and by-products of the preceding copper etch process. The second etchant may then be comprised of a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, in a ratio as it is, for example, specified above or at any other ratio that is deemed appropriate. With the second etchant, at least the barrier layer 154 may be removed above the edge region 103 and especially at the bevel 105. By removing the barrier layer 154, irrespective whether in a one-step etch process by providing the etchant 121 as a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, or by a multi-step etch process with a copper removal substantially without nitric acid, the probability of copper contamination of the substrate 100 in subsequent processes and contamination of wafer handling components is significantly reduced compared to the conventional approach, in which the barrier layer 154 remains substantially intact.

Moreover, in some embodiments, it may be advantageous to also supply the etchant 121 at the back side 102 of the substrate 100 so as to remove metal and barrier layer material that may have been deposited during the sputter deposition process in forming the layers 154 and 155. In removing material from the back side 102, the same criteria apply as previously pointed out with reference to etching the edge region 103. That is, the material may be removed in a single etch process by supplying a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid, or copper may be removed in an initial etch step in the absence of nitric acid so as to substantially

avoid the generation of nitric oxide. Typically, available etch tools as are used for copper removal at the edge region 103 may also be configured to enable the etching of the back side 102.

Fig. 1d schematically shows a cross-sectional view of the substrate 100 in accordance with one particular embodiment of the present invention. In Fig. 1d, the etch process in the presence of a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid has been continued so as to also remove the dielectric layer 153, and in further embodiments, the etch process may be continued so as to also remove any underlying layer, such as the dielectric layer 152 to finally substantially expose the substrate surface of the region 103 and the bevel 105. For instance, if the substrate 100 represents a silicon substrate or an SOI substrate, a blank silicon surface is exposed, which significantly reduces the possibility of contamination of subsequent processes and also provides a mechanically stable substrate edge region 103. A lateral extension 158 of the edge region 103 may be appropriately defined by the selective application of the etchant 121 (cf Fig. 1c), since a relatively sharp boundary between the device region 104 and the etch region 103 may be obtained by etching through the dielectric layers 153 and 152. The extension 158 may be reduced compared to a conventional edge treating process due to the lack of a transition region, between the device region 104 and the edge region 103, having a reduced mechanical stability. Thus, the lateral extension 158 may be selected so as to be compatible with substrate handling tools substantially without requiring process margins that take account of delamination of fragments of the dielectric layer 153. Thus, according to the present invention, the device region 104 may be increased while, nevertheless, contamination of subsequent processes and process tools is still reduced.

Fig. 1e schematically shows the substrate 100 after the removal of excess material of the metal layer 156 (cf Fig. 1d) by CMP, wherein additionally the seed layer 155 and the barrier layer 154 outside the trench 157 have been removed so as to provide a planarized metallization layer 151A. As previously explained, the risk of material delamination and thus, of copper contamination is significantly reduced due to the removal of metal and barrier layer material, especially at the bevel 105 and above the edge region 103. In the particular embodiment, in which the

substrate surface is substantially exposed by also removing the dielectric layers 153 and 152, which may partially be comprised of a low-K dielectric, as shown in Fig. 1e, a still further improved reduction of contamination is achieved due to the substantially "inert" surface area on the edge region 103 and the bevel 105.

Fig. 1f schematically shows the substrate 100 after the formation of a second metallization layer 161 on top of the planarized first metallization layer 151A when subjected to an etch process that is similar to the process as described with reference to Fig. 1c. The second metallization layer 161 may comprise a dielectric etch stop layer 162 followed by a dielectric layer 163, wherein, for example the dielectric layers 162 and 163 may be comprised of a low-K dielectric. A trench 167A and a via 167B are formed in the dielectric layer 163, the sidewalls of which are covered by a barrier layer 164 followed by a seed layer 165. Finally, a metal layer 166, for example comprised of copper, is formed above the trench 167A.

As previously explained with reference to Fig. 1b, dielectric material of the layers 162, 163 as well as the conductive material of the barrier layer 164, comprised of, for instance tantalum and/or tantalum nitride, and of the seed layer 165 may also have been deposited on the edge region 103 and the bevel 105. Thus, a further etch process may be performed using an etch module as is described with reference to Fig. 1c so as to provide one or more etchants at the edge region 103 in order to remove unwanted metal barrier layer material and dielectric material from the edge region 103 and especially from the bevel 105. Regarding the etch strategy and the etchants used therein, the same criteria apply as previously outlined with reference to Fig. 1c.

Fig. 1g schematically shows the substrate 100 after completion of the etch process, wherein material on the bevel 105 and on the edge region 103 is effectively removed so as to substantially expose the substrate surface. The further processing of the substrate 100 as shown in Fig. 1g may be continued with a further CMP process so as to remove excess material of the metal layer 166 and to planarize the metallization layer 161. Again, the substantially cleared bevel 105 and the effective material removal on the edge region 103 provide for a significantly reduced contamination rate compared to conventional processing. Moreover,



during the further processing of the substrate 100 in forming contact pads and solder bumps, especially the effective clearance of the bevel 105, significantly reduces material delamination and thus, contamination of subsequent processes, especially when the metallization layers 161 and 151A comprise copper.

Electron excited x-ray fluorescence measurements of a plurality of test substrates comprising a metallization layer stack including a low-K dielectric material on the basis of silicon oxide, such as SiCOH, a tantalum containing barrier layer and a copper metal layer confirmed that substantially no traces of copper, tantalum and oxygen were present on the bevel 105 while only negligible amounts of tantalum and oxygen could be traced on the edge region 103. Thus, the measurement revealed that copper can efficiently be removed from critical substrate regions such as the bevel 105 and the edge region 103, thereby significantly reducing copper contamination of subsequent processes and process tools. Moreover, by performing an etch process, which, in accordance with one particular embodiment, is designed to remove substantially dielectric materials, in particular mechanically weak low-K dielectrics, after the completion of a metallization layer, the formation of mechanically weak layer stacks, at the substrate perimeter, may be eliminated, thereby reducing the risk of material delamination in subsequent processes. The relatively sharp boundary created by etching through the dielectrics, possibly down to the substrate surface, provides the potentiality of defining the size of the edge region 103 in conformity with tool specifications regarding the required "space" at the substrate front side 102 for a correct substrate handling. Thus, the valuable substrate area available for actual semiconductor devices may be increased for a given substrate size compared to the conventional technique.

Further modifications and variations of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art in view of this description. Accordingly, the description is to be construed as illustrative only and is for the purpose of teaching those skilled in the art the general manner of carrying out the present invention. It is to be understood that the forms of the invention shown and described herein are to be taken as the presently preferred embodiments.

## CLAIMS

1. A method comprising:

selectively applying one or more etchants to an edge region of a substrate, the substrate having a central region adjacent to said edge region, wherein a metallization layer stack is formed at least on the central region, the metallization layer stack comprising at least an insulating layer, a barrier layer and a metal layer; and

removing unwanted material at least of said metal layer and said barrier layer selectively from the edge region.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising removing material of said insulating layer selectively from said edge region.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said one or more etchants comprise a diluted compound of nitric acid and hydrofluoric acid.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein a first etchant is applied to remove material of said metal layer, and a second etchant is applied to remove material at least of the barrier layer.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein at least said second etchant comprises said diluted compound of nitric acid and hydrofluoric acid.

6. The method of claim 4, wherein said first etchant is substantially devoid of nitric acid.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said metal layer comprises copper.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said substrate is exposed in said edged region during said material removal.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein applying said etchant is performed in an substantially air tight ambient to substantially avoid the emission of gaseous nitric oxides.

10. The method of claim 1 further comprising applying said etchant at the backside of said substrate to remove unwanted material.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein said metal layer comprises copper and is formed by an electro-chemical process.

12. A method of reducing contamination of a substrate after formation of a metallization layer stack on said substrate, the method comprising:

selectively removing unwanted material from an edge region of said substrate by using a first etchant comprising a diluted compound of nitric acid and hydrofluoric acid as the main component.

13. The method of claim 12, wherein at least material of a barrier layer of said metallization layer stack is removed.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein dielectric material is removed so as to expose said substrate at said edge region.

15. The method of claim 12, wherein unwanted metal of said metallization layer is removed.

16. The method of claim 12, further comprising removing unwanted metal with a second etchant other than said first etchant from said edge region prior to selectively removing unwanted material with said first etchant.

17. The method of claim 12, wherein said metallization layer comprises copper and selectively removing unwanted material with said first etchant is performed in a protected environment to substantially avoid liberation of gaseous nitric oxide.

18. The method of claim 12, further comprising removing unwanted material from a backside of said substrate.

19. A semiconductor structure comprising:

a substrate having a front side and a backside, the front side divided into a device region and an edge region;

a plurality of semiconductor devices formed in and over said device region, each semiconductor device comprising at least one metallization layer including a dielectric layer and a metal line, the metal line formed in said dielectric layer and being separated therefrom by a conductive barrier layer;

wherein said edge region is substantially devoid of material of said metal line, said barrier layer and said dielectric layer.

20. The semiconductor structure of claim 19, wherein said dielectric layer comprises a low-K material having a permittivity less than approximately 3.0.

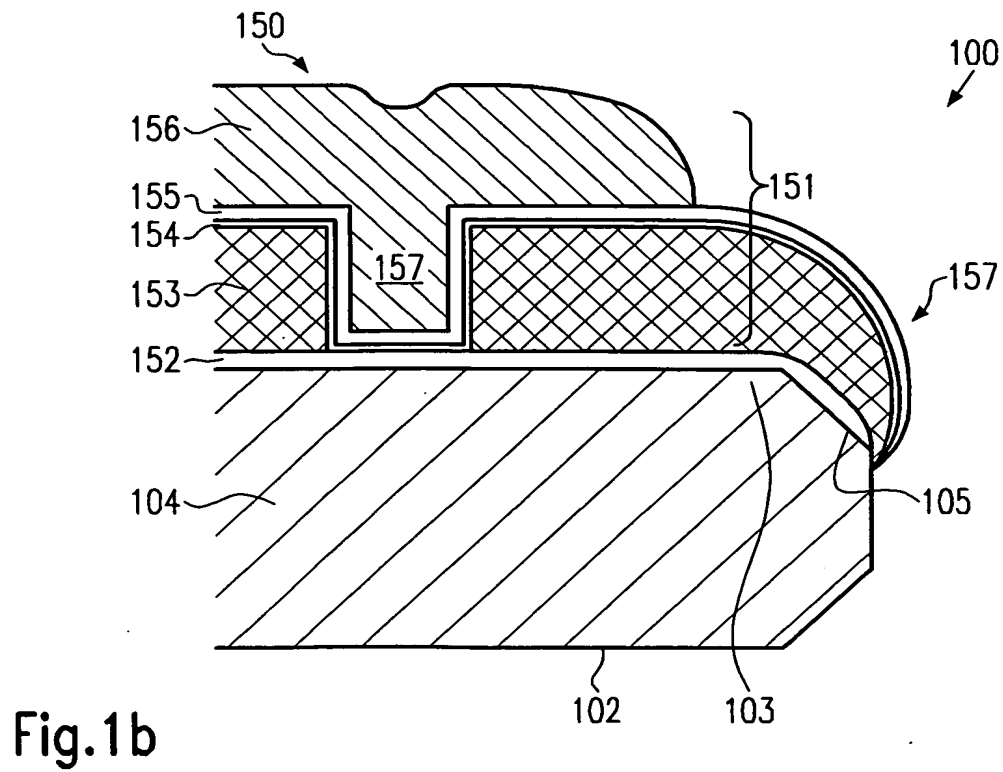
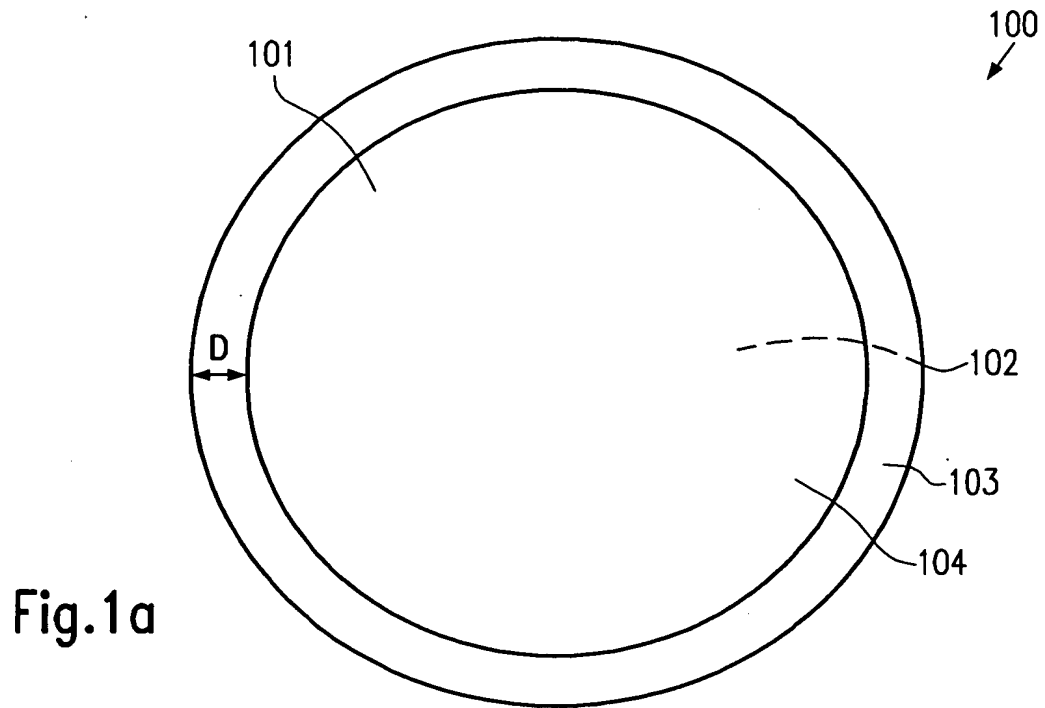
21. The semiconductor structure of claim 19, wherein said edge region includes a bevel.

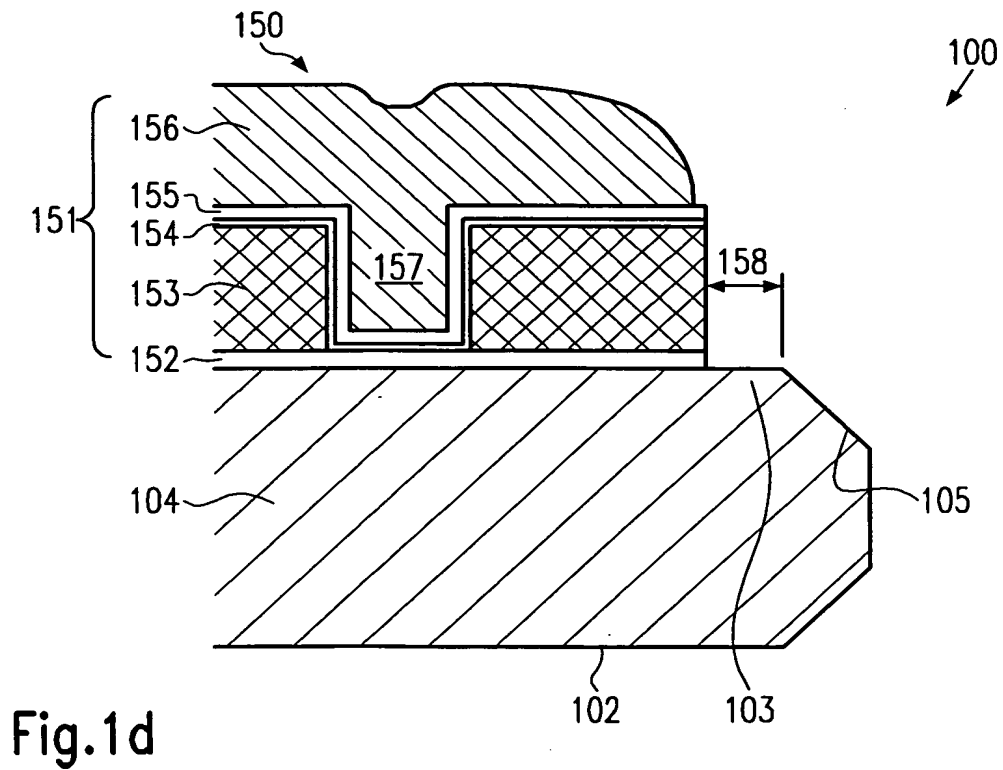
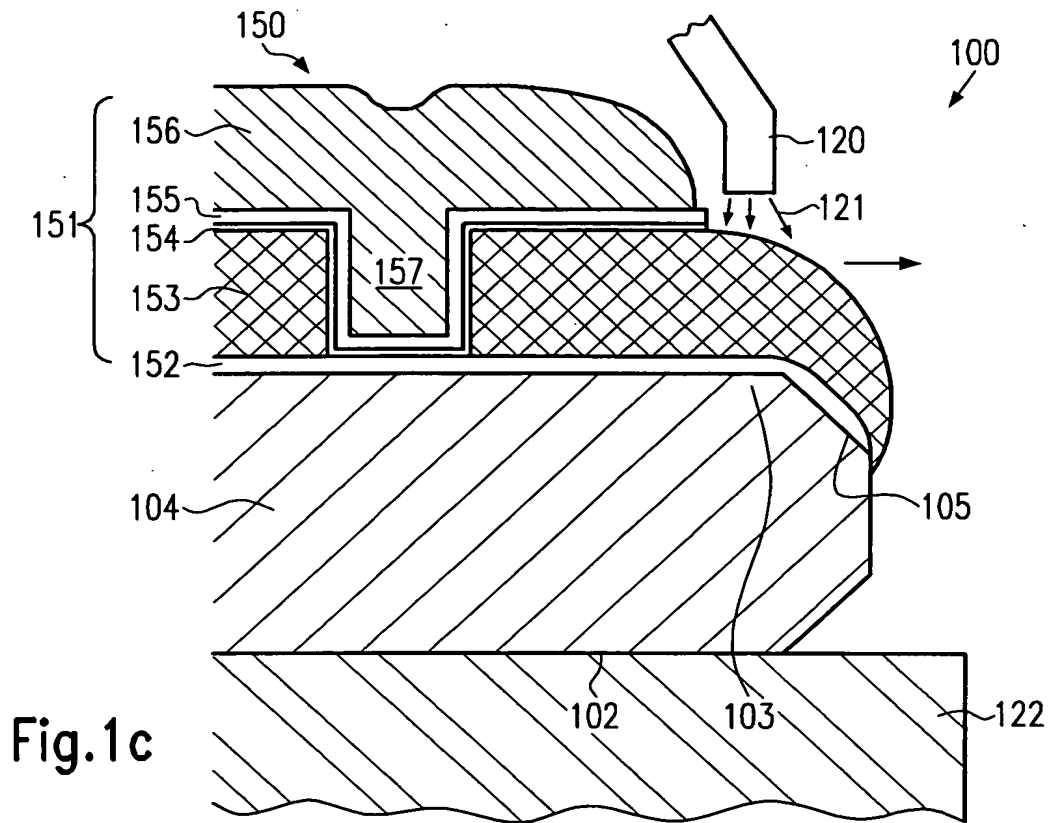
22. The semiconductor structure of claim 19, wherein said metal line comprises copper.

## ABSTRACT

According to the present invention, a metal and a barrier material, such as copper and a tantalum based barrier material, are effectively removed from the wafer edge and especially from the bevel by using an etchant that comprises a diluted mixture of hydrofluoric acid and nitric acid. The method is compatible with currently available etch modules for removing metal from the wafer edge, wherein depending on the hardware specifics, copper, barrier material and dielectric material may be removed in a single etch step, or a first etch step may be performed substantially without any nitric acid so as to avoid the formation of nitric oxides. In this way, the formation of instable layer stacks may be substantially avoided, thereby reducing the risk of material delamination from the substrate edge.

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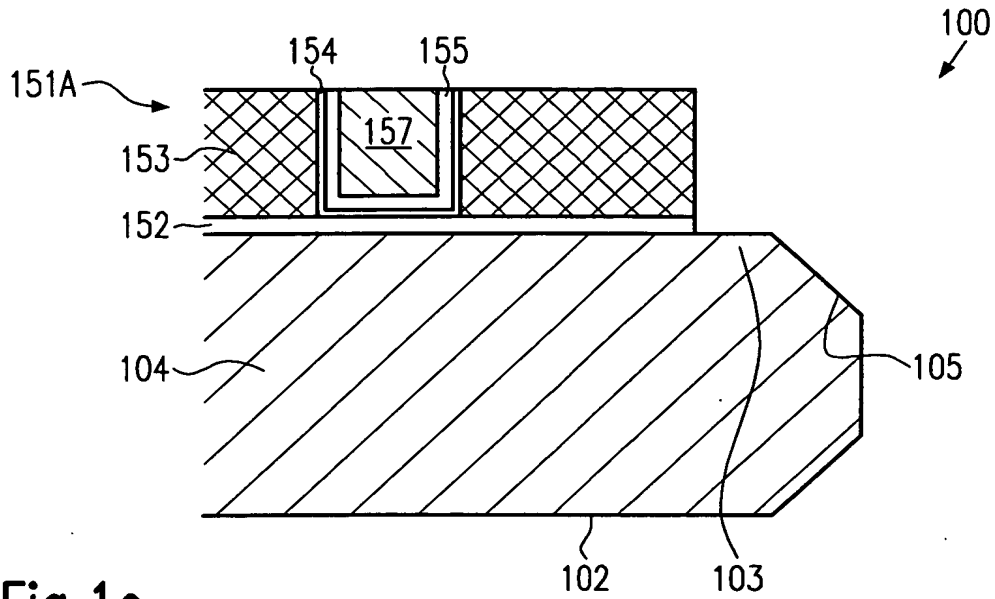


Fig. 1e

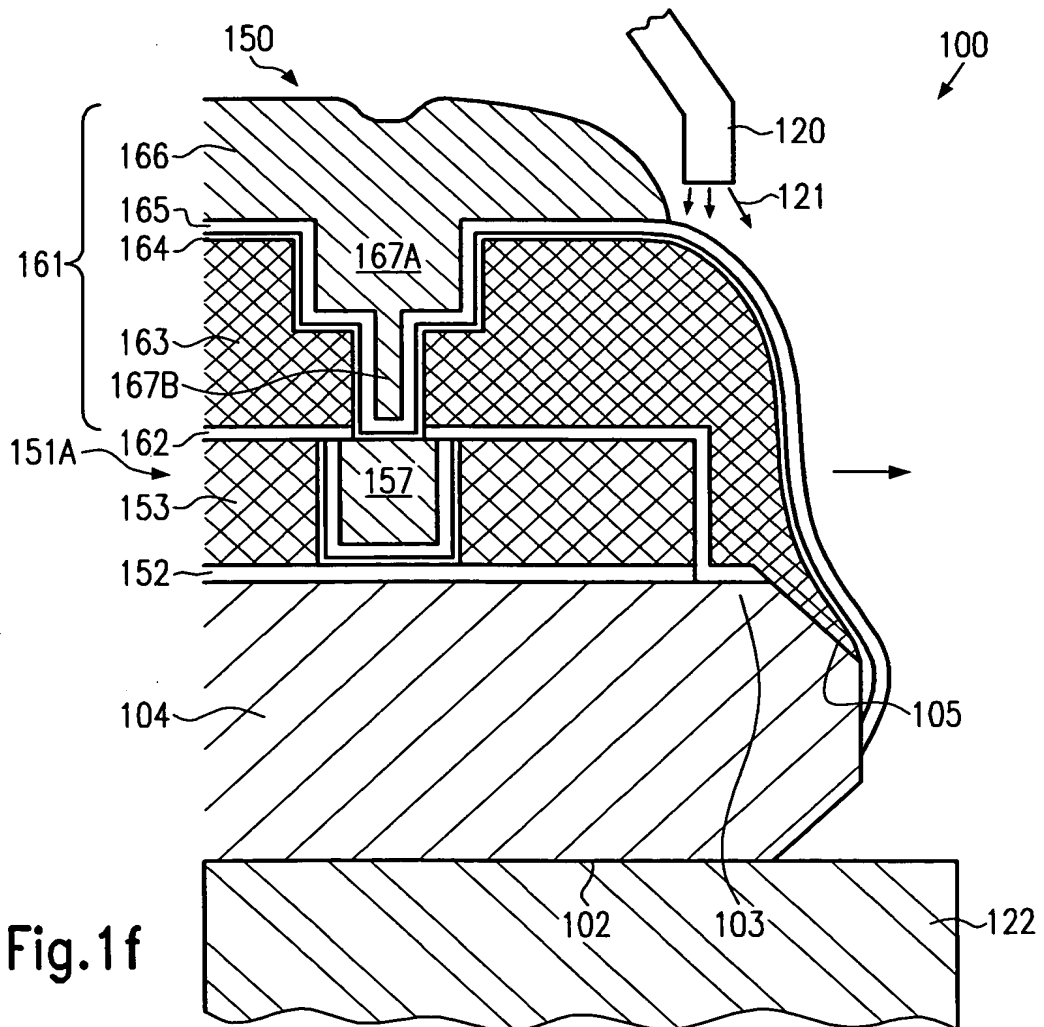


Fig. 1f



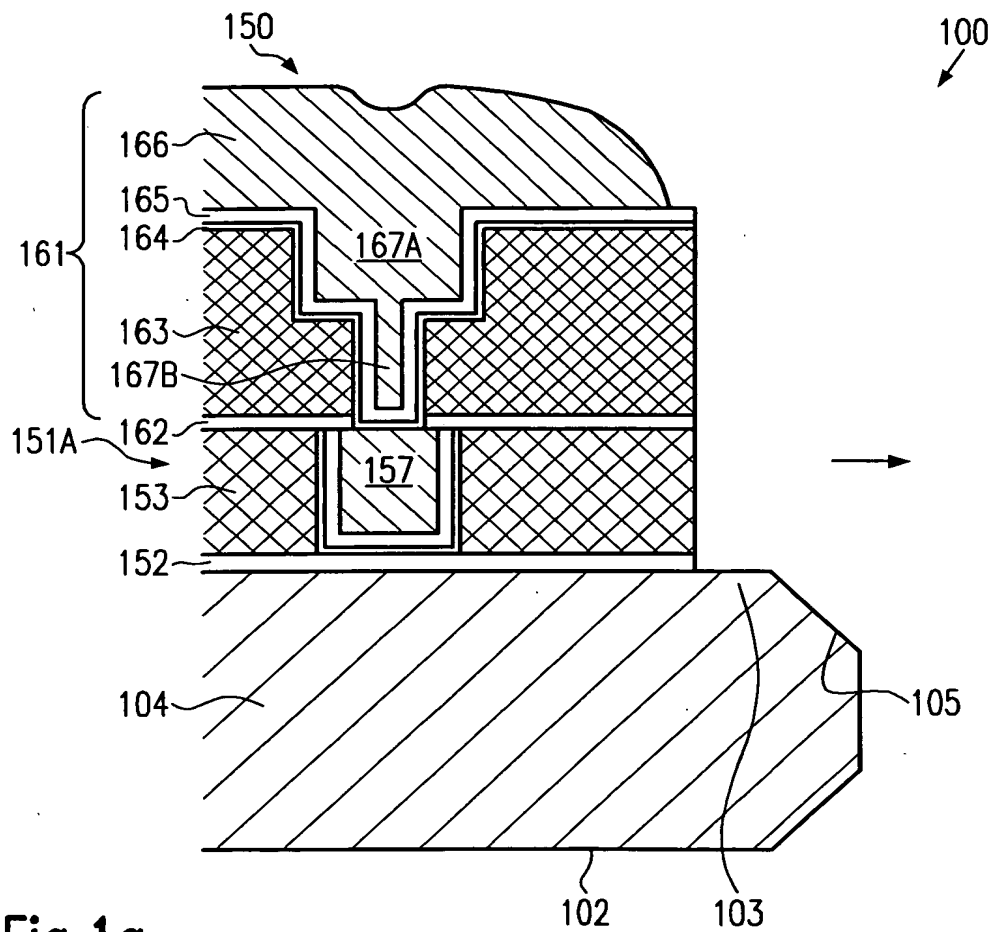


Fig.1g